



NASW

National Association of Social Workers / Connecticut Chapter

2139 Silas Deane Highway
Suite 205
Rocky Hill, CT 06067
(860) 257-8066

Shannon Perkins, LMSW, President
Stephen Wanczyk-Karp, LMSW, Executive Director
info.naswct@socialworkers.org

**Testimony on S.B. 660: An Act Expanding Workers' Compensation Benefits For Mental
Or Emotional Impairments Suffered By All Workers
Labor and Public Employees Committee
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Submitted By: Stephen Wanczyk-Karp, LMSW**

The National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter representing over 2,300 members supports **S.B. 660**. We are also in support of **S.B. 665** and **S.B. 666**.

Connecticut was one of the first states to pass a mental health parity law, first limited to 10 diagnosis in 1998 and then full parity in 2000. The purpose behind this law is to recognize that mental health conditions are as valid as physical health conditions and that both should be treated equally. It is past time the workers compensation benefits provide the same parity as required of insurance coverage.

It is undisputable that certain employment settings and jobs are extremely stressful, can be anxiety provoking and sometimes traumatic. Having to perform tasks that are dangerous can over time lead to mental distress. Working in jobs that are under appreciated by the public or even condemned by members of the public can lead to mental dissonance, anxiety and depression. The current pandemic has greatly heightened the risks of work-related mental health conditions, however such risks have always existed. Mental health conditions that have a causation from one's employment should be recognized as such and covered by workers compensation.

In an article in the New England Journal of Medicine, *Preventing a Parallel Pandemic – A National Strategy to Protect Clinicians' Well-Being* (May 13, 2020) the authors point out that "after the 2003 SARS outbreak in Toronto, studies found high levels of emotional distress amongst hospital workers" that were a direct result of their work to address the outbreak. Likewise, the authors report that "Stigma, including self-stigmatization" was a problem for nurses surveyed after the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster who "described the emotional turmoil of being forced to choose between protecting themselves and their loved ones and doing their duty as caregivers during a national crisis". This kind of mental distress anchored in work conditions and experiences is taking place right now in this worldwide pandemic. It also however took place pre-pandemic, and will again post-pandemic, in the work of certain professions and jobs.

In regards to the field of healthcare, especially mental health, some pre-pandemic studies have shown as many as 45-55% of health care professionals suffer from burnout, which is associated with higher rates of anxiety, depression, substance abuse and suicide. Current and post-pandemic will see an increase in these disturbing percentages. These are work related conditions that need to be addressed as such.

Individuals with mental disorders caused by their employment should not have to rely on having their own health insurance to cover medical costs. Depending on one's health insurance coverage, the worker may face high deductibles, expensive co-pays and lack of coverage for some conditions (especially for the 50% of workers covered under a self-insured plan). And this is the good scenario for those workers that have health insurance. For too many low-income workers there is no insurance to assist them.

The lack of workers compensation for mental or emotional conditions leads to workers underperforming and causing a worsening of their condition(s) because they cannot afford the needed time off for treatment. They put themselves at higher risk to self and to others. Treatment delayed is treatment at higher costs financially and personally.

Social workers know of the harm caused to individuals, family members and greater society when a mental or emotional condition goes untreated. We also know of the benefits of timely treatment that allows a worker to return to productive employment, having work income and self-worth. We urge the Labor and Public Employees Committee to support workers compensation benefits for mental and emotional impairments.